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SUBJECT: HIV/AIDS FINDINGS OF NIGERIA'S 2003
DEMOGRAPHIC AND HEALTH SURVEY

REF: LAGOS 1247

1. Summary: The findings below are from the 2003 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) and expand on the findings presented in reftel. Knowledge of AIDS in Nigeria is fairly widespread, but knowledge of prevention is less so. Knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to prevention and control of HIV/AIDS and care of people living with the virus vary considerably by age group, region, and education level. These findings can be used to target programs and tailor messages on HIV/AIDS. End summary.

Overall Impact

2. The first case of HIV infection in Nigeria was recorded in 1986 and rates of infection have increased. Estimates of HIV prevalence rose from 1.8 percent in 1991 to 4.5 percent in 1996, and the 2001 National HIV/Syphilis Sentinel Survey estimated a national HIV sero-prevalence rate of 5.8 percent. Regional prevalence rates varied significantly, from a high of 7.7 percent in the South South to a low of 3.3 percent in the North West. The greatest actual concern is projected mortality due to AIDS over the next few years and its socio-economic consequences. Projections of annual deaths caused by AIDS in Nigeria have increased from fewer than 50,000 in 1999 to about 350,000 in 2003-2004. The number of Nigerian children who are likely to lose one or both parents to AIDS is projected to be near 2 million in 2003-2004. The magnitude of the problem has prompted the Government of Nigeria to review its national HIV/AIDS policy.

Knowledge of Prevention Methods

3. More men than women overall know about condom use and limiting partners as ways to avoid AIDS, but the pattern of knowledge by background characteristics are similar for men and women. By age group, the youngest and oldest men and women in the survey (ages 15-19 and 40-49) are least likely to know about these specific ways to avoid HIV transmission. The low knowledge rates among the youngest group (37 percent for women and 52 percent for men) are important to note because sexual activity often begins before age 20.

4. Knowledge of prevention methods varies widely by education level. Knowledge of condom use to avoid AIDS ranges from 33 percent among women with no education to 74 percent among women with higher education. For men, the rate ranges from 45 percent among those with no education to 81 percent among those with higher education.

Beliefs about AIDS

5. Some of the NDHS questions gauged how many people correctly reject local misconceptions regarding HIV and AIDS. The survey measured the percentage of people who know that a) it is possible for a healthy-looking person to have the AIDS virus, b) AIDS cannot be transmitted by mosquito bites, c) AIDS cannot be transmitted by witchcraft or other supernatural means, and d) a person cannot become infected by sharing food with someone with AIDS. Again, levels of knowledge are higher among men than women, and the greatest variability is by level of education.

6. Overall, 53 percent of women and 73 percent of men know that a healthy-looking person can have AIDS. For each of the misconceptions about transmission noted above, about 40 percent of women know that none is really a mode of transmission; the percentage is slightly higher for men. Respondents who know that a healthy-looking person can have AIDS and who also reject the two most common misconceptions about transmission (AIDS can be transmitted by mosquitoes or supernatural means) are in a minority: 21 percent of women and 28 percent of men.

Stigma and Discrimination

17. To assess the level of acceptance of persons living with HIV, respondents were asked questions regarding behavioral treatment and attitudes. Overall, about 40 percent of respondents reported they would be willing to care of a family member with HIV at home. The greatest variation in this response was by region. Only one quarter of respondents in the South West said they would care for a sick relative at home. A majority of respondents overall (61 percent of women and 70 percent of men) said they believe the HIV-positive status of a family member does not need to remain a secret. But only 20 percent of women and 28 percent of men said they would purchase vegetables from a person with the AIDS virus. And only 23 percent of women and 27 percent of men believe that a female teacher with the AIDS virus should be allowed to continue teaching in school. Only 3 percent of women and 7 percent of men reported acceptance of all four indicators in this category.

Knowledge of Mother to Child Transmission

18. Overall, 24 percent of women who had given birth in the two years preceding the survey had received counseling about HIV/AIDS during a prenatal care visit. This rate varied by region, ranging from about 60 percent in the South East and South West to only 15 percent and 11 percent in the North East and North West, respectively.

Sexual Negotiation, Attitudes, and Communication

19. To assess the ability of women to negotiate safer sex with a spouse who has a sexually transmitted infection (STI), all respondents were asked a) whether a wife is justified in refusing to have sex with her husband if she knows he has a STI and b) whether she is justified in asking her husband to use a condom. Nearly 90 percent of women and 95 percent of men responded that a woman may either refuse to have sex with her husband or ask him to wear a condom in this situation. Both men and women are more likely to report that a woman is justified to refuse to have sex than to propose use of a condom.

110. The NDHS assessed whether male respondents agreed with various statements regarding condoms. Thirty percent of men agreed with the statement that condoms are inconvenient to use, and 37 percent agreed that condoms reduce sexual pleasure. Most men know that condoms cannot be reused, and a majority agree that a condom protects against disease. Overall, 30 percent of men agreed with the statement that a woman has no right to tell a man to use a condom. This rate varies by region: 73 percent of male respondents agreed with the statement in the North West, while between 10 and 25 percent of the male respondents in the other regions of the country agreed with the statement.

111. Nationally, 36 percent of married women and 58 percent of married men said they had discussed prevention of AIDS with their partners. Over 90 percent of respondents said that discussion of AIDS is acceptable in the media, at home, and in schools, churches, and mosques.

High Risk Sex and Condom Use

112. For both men and women, the percentage of respondents engaging in high-risk sex (sex with a non-marital, non-cohabiting partner) increases with level of education, from 2 percent of women and 11 percent of men with no education to 33 percent of women and 48 percent of men with higher education. The percentage of respondents who use a condom when they engage in high-risk sex also increases with education level.

113. Compared to overall percentages, high-risk sexual behavior is more prevalent among young men and women (age 15 to 24). Among these respondents, 29 percent of women and 78 percent of men reported having high-risk sex in the 12 months preceding the survey. As with respondents overall, the percentage of young men and women engaging in high-risk sex increased with education level: from 3 percent among women with no education to 75 percent among women with higher education. There was an insufficient number of cases of men to allow for analysis by education level. High-risk sexual behavior also varies by region for women. Most female respondents in the southern regions reported having engaged in high-risk sex, while only 35 percent in North Central and fewer than 10 percent in North East and North West reported similarly. Nationally, most young women who are sexually active live with a partner, while more young men who are sexually active

do not live exclusively with a single partner. The percentage of young people with multiple partners is fairly low: 2 percent of women and 8 percent of men.

Sexual Behavior among Young People

¶14. One fifth of women age 15-19 had sex before the age of 15, and half of women aged 20-24 had sex before age 18. Percentages among men are lower (8 percent and 22 percent, respectively). The percentage of women who had sex before age 15 declined with increasing education, from 42 percent among women with no education, to less than 1 percent among women with higher education.

¶15. Overall, young women are less than half as likely as young men to know of a source of condoms. For both men and women, the likelihood of knowing of a source is greater for respondents with higher education levels and in the southern regions. Among sexually active respondents aged 15-24, only 6 percent of women and 17 percent of men reported using a condom the first time they had sex. No urban-rural variation was found among young persons as to whether or not they had had premarital sex, but urban women and men were about twice as likely to have used a condom the last time they had sex.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

¶16. Overall, 55 percent of women had never heard of STIs. One-fifth of all women could identify a symptom a man might have, and one-fifth could identify a symptom a woman might have. Most men have heard of an STI (71 percent), though not all who had heard of an STI could identify a symptom a man or woman might have.

Orphans

¶17. Overall, the NDHS found that fewer than 1 percent of children had lost both parents as a result of AIDS; however, 6 percent of children under age 15 had lost at least one parent. The highest prevalence is in the South East, where 11 percent of children have lost one or both parents. Nationwide, 11 percent of children under age 15 are living with neither mother nor father, as are 18 percent of the children aged 10-14.

Comment

¶18. The NDHS findings can help to target programs and tailor messages on HIV/AIDS for different age groups, regions, and education levels. Several findings raise questions that warrant further explanation or investigation. With regard to beliefs and social stigma, for example, while 45 percent of women and 59 percent of men knew that a person cannot become infected by sharing food with someone who has the AIDS virus, only 20 percent of women and 28 percent of men reported they would buy vegetables from a shopkeeper who has AIDS. Also related to beliefs and such stigma, men in the South West are least likely to be willing to care for a family member with HIV, but most likely to believe that the HIV-positive status of a family member does not need to remain a secret. Perhaps this second belief does not reflect an acceptance of openness per se, but rather a desire to know the HIV-status of potential partners to better avoid those who are HIV-positive.

¶19. Generally, men and women with higher education levels are more likely to know about HIV/AIDS and prevention methods and to engage in behaviors that help prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. The notable exception to this correlation is in regard to having sex with non-married, non-cohabiting partners, where likelihood rises with education level for both men and women. Reliable data on HIV prevalence among these groups are needed to determine whether this high-risk behavior is of great concern or whether it is offset by the higher rates of condom use and other preventative behavior.

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